

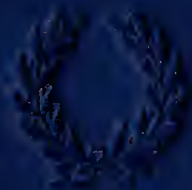
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A Score in Metre



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THOMAS SHARP

A Score in Metre
by **Thomas Sharp**

London: A. C. Fifield, 13
Clifford's Inn, E.C. 4. 1920

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TO MY BELOVED
CRITIC ON THE HEARTH,
MY WIFE,
WHOSE MORDANT CRITICISM
HAS CONFINED THIS BOOK
WITHIN SO NARROW LIMITS.

Author's Note

THE poems in this collection have appeared in *The Academy*, *The British Review*, *The Cambridge Magazine*, *Chambers's Journal*, *The Commonwealth*, *Everyman*, *The Glasgow Herald*, *New Days*, *The New Witness*, *The Presbyterian Messenger*, *The St. Martin-in-the-Field's Monthly Review*, *The Treasury*, and *The Windsor Magazine*.

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"Nicodemus" has been adapted as a hymn for the Presbyterian Church of England, and the copyright of that version is theirs.

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The Magi

O DID you see the witless three
Ride through the town this even,
Three grey-beard loons who think the moon's
A new star in the heaven ?

O strange their speech ! They babbled each
Of a star and a new-born king ;
And one, quoth he : “ From a far countrie
Gifts for the babe we bring.”

O never, I ween, the like was seen :
These learnèd fools and old,
They've ta'en with them full many a gem
And costly spice and gold.

And they have faced the Syrian waste—
That would not I or thou.
What! ride afar for babe or star ?
There be stars and babes enow.

The Night-Watchman

SCARLET against the sombre night
My brazier burns, to throw
On road upturned a cirque of light
For those in dark that go.
The sights of day are gathered up,
Its urgent sounds retire ;
I fill afresh that flaming cup,
Brimmed with its wine of fire.

For me no daylight craft, to build
Or delve—a vigil mine
In night's wide nave, in street-aisle stilled
That lamps like tapers line.
Here, while the muffled hours creep by,
Beyond day's barrèd door,
I am enfranchised of the sky,
Initiate in its lore.

When on bare heavens I discern
A bowed and shrunken moon
Awatch till stalwart sun return,
Stands writ for me the rune ;
And when emerges star on star
I mark how on the untrod
Summits of darkness leaping are
The far watch-fires of God.

A Sussex Song

THE white road leads to London Town,
By hamlet, hill and hollow,
The green path winds to Chancton Down,
Now which one shall we follow ?

Oh, London streets are paved with gold,
But who would be for changing
The wizard wealth of wood and wold
For metal joy-estranging ?

So foot it we across the field,
And climb the low stile over :
Mount, and for you the widening weald,
The drifted scent of clover,

Cloud-armies mustering silently,
Their shadowy ranks retreating
Along the Down, and glimpse of sea
Where sea and sky are meeting.

The white road leads to London Town,
By hamlet, hill and hollow,
The green path winds to Chancton Down,
And that's the one we'll follow.

Nicodemus

I CANNOT find Thee in the crowded city,
Nor touch Thy garment's hem ;
Though multitudes have seen Thy face of pity,
Heard Thy voice speak to them.

Mine is the fault—my weakness and my doubting
Withhold me from Thy side,
Fear-haunted by the wrangling and the shouting
From morn till eventide.

So, Lord, I come—Thee in the garden seeking,
When dies the day of strife :
Let not my weakness hinder Thee from speaking
Words of eternal life.

May

“THIS is the Virgin’s month,” the breeze
Has whispered to the dreaming trees ;
And eager are they and astir
To put on fairest robes for her.

The brotherhood of elms now make
Triumphal arches for her sake ;
Gold bells laburnums swing, and white
The hawthorn stands, her acolyte.

The chestnut knows her coming—he
Worshippeth in his bravery :
Others attire them in their best,
He makes a shrine with candles dressed.

This is the Virgin’s month, when gay
The trees as children are, but they
Can never move from where they grow,
Never in glad procession go.

The Matchmaker

I HEARD Dame Wind sing loud with glee,
 Dame Wind the old matchmaker ;
I heard her (laughing “ He ! He ! He ! ”)
Vow as she moved from tree to tree
Sundry and all should mated be—
“ Though sure no priest am I,” quo’ she,
 “ Parson nor sober Quaker.”

I heard Dame Wind moan as the sea,
 Dame Wind the sad matchmaker—
Was here a waste where bloom should be,
There starvelings huddled on the lea.
“ Mating, it is a mystery !
No priest, no parson I,” wailed she,
 “ Naught but an undertaker.”

The Companion

BY us and all Jerusalem
The lifted cross was seen ;
Lifted in vain for us and them
Who saw—a Nazarene
Two thieves between.

Rumour we heard how dawn disclosed
An empty sepulchre ;
Yet still with Mary we supposed
'Twas but the gardener
That spake to her.

We reasoned of the Crucified
Nor word nor sign forgot :
Yet though He journeyed at our side
New-born from Joseph's grot,
We knew Him not.

But when He entered our low door
And, fellow at the board,
Broke bread and blessed our simple store—
Ah ! then in glad accord
Our hearts cried " Lord ! "

After Rain

O SUMMER rain, come not again
To-night, but on some morrow
Return and leave that peace at eve
The world is fain to borrow.

O rain benign, thy subtle wine
Makes glad the grass and greener ;
Freshness of morn is here re-born,
Yet with a note serener.

Upon the downs are cloudy crowns
Sombre, but there a gladder
Sign hangs for sight—yon shaft of light
Gleams in the west—Hope's ladder.

Grey grows the west ; earth seems a nest
Hushed, with a lone bird calling
Soft to his mate : " Love, it is late :
Come, for the dusk is falling."

O summer rain, come not again
To-night, but on some morrow
Return and leave this peace at eve
The heart is fain to borrow.

Storm and Flood

(1914)

CAN ye sleep, guidman, can ye sleep ?
That's no the wind ava,
But the wail o' the ghaists o' the drooned in the deep
And the groans o' the sodger lads as they fa'
In the trenches awa'.

Can ye sleep, guidman, can ye sleep ?
That's no the rain ava,
It's the waesome soun' o' the dreep, dreep, dreep
O' the bluid o' the laddies that stricken ca'
On their mithers awa'.

Are ye sure, guidman, are ye sure
The sicht yestreen ye saw
Was the crimson sun on the flooded muir ?
Or the red, red tide frae Flanders awa'
Sweepin' in on us a' ?

Lights Out

(1916)

FEW are the lamps that torch the night ;
Their faces wanting from the street
We move home in the faint starlight
Silent, and with uncertain feet.

Flicker our human lamps and die
(The glowing hearts we loved of old)
And we walk dumb 'neath a night sky
Wherefrom the rays come far and cold.

Father of Lights, we lift the brow,
Tread the blurred course Thy stars attend,
And clutch a hope that lights quenched now
Shall beam a welcome at the end.

Autumn Woods

(1918)

UPON the woods at midnight broke the dread
Cavalry of the winds. The fell hosts tore
Through the embattled boughs with an uproar
Like spume of dragons roused from ocean-bed.
Then through the fury sounded overhead
The hissing of invisible blades that shore
Ten thousand leaves : stark on the woodland floor
Oncoming Dawn revealed them pilèd red.

Streams the new day through boughs whose leafy pride
Scarce ray of sun could pierce or starlight keen :
Behold Heaven's glory through the shattered
screen !
Red pilèd leaves, your leavening dust shall bide,
The rare mould of that Spring for which you died,
That unimaginable world of green.

Cleopatra's Needle

PILLAR that through the hour of Egypt's glory
Saw earth crouch in the shadow of those kings
Of whom the dotting Nile babbles and sings,
Mocked by the pyramids and ruins hoary—
Hast thou forgot the pomp, the transitory
Triumphs? Amid the world's concretest things
Thou standest now and hearest murmurings
More potent than the Nile's loud oratory.

Ascends the voice of Labour, mute no more,
And through the city's multitudinous roar
Speaketh the universal Voice, time-taught :
“ Weighed is the worth of Egypt ; this grey stone,
Yon desert tombs, slave-wrought, endure alone ;
The blazoned might of kings is come to naught.”

St. Martin-in-the-Fields

ST. MARTIN-IN-THE-FIELDS ! Fashioned in
stone

Endures the dreamer's vision : a far-seen
Lighthouse of God amid a sea of green,
Its column-spire a candle shining lone.
Even as the folk aforetime to its own
St. Martin flocked, so to that tower serene
Crept London till the spreading lea by mean
Lanes and the statued Square was overgrown.

St. Martin-in-the-Fields ! That beacon light
Over the surging of a human sea
Shines now, where pitiful homes of healing be,
And where sin's charnel-houses shrink from sight.
Gone are the fields : God-man of Galilee,
O for Thy vision of fields to harvest white !

Lights

REST on this ridge and watch the twilight stealing
Upon the far-off city, and the grey
Deepen to dark, the bravery of day—
Her flaunted towers and pinnacles—concealing.
Earth fades to heaven ; and stars with kindred feeling
Commingle with the lowlier array
Of earthly lights ; ranked in the darkness they
Seem angel-hosts in adoration kneeling.

As creeps the dark, so in the wake of Time
Death ; nor may might and majesty withstand
The obliterating shadow of his hand.
Time fades to night eterne ; but the sublime
Spirits of earth and heaven, a starry band,
Burn before God in their immortal prime.

The Tree

IN yon meadow there's a tree
Laughs right merrily.
How he flings his arms about,
In the sunshine swaying free !
On the wind he loves to shout
To the blithe sun sailing by
Through the deeps of sky.
How he strives the stars to get
Nightly in his leafy net !
You can hear him softly sigh,
Softly croon
To the shy cloud-robèd moon.
His low whisper ere daybreak
Bids the birds be full awake,
That with madrigal and glee
They and he
May the world from slumber shake.

Humble kinsman of the sun
And his boon companion !
Nodding friend of stars and grass !
Brother of the kine that mass
'Neath thy shoulder, there to pass
Contemplative hours and cool ;
Friend of all the singing school
(Closer friend none other is)
Warden of their nurseries !

The Tree

Hast thou compassed some profound
Art that busy man has missed ?
Or hast turned alchemist ?
Canst thou gather from the ground
Juices of such influence
That thou scatterest unaware
Health and music in the air ?
Hast thou touched the fountains whence
Springeth laughter, springeth mirth,
Delving 'neath the rind of earth ?
Hast thou learned the secret—tell !
Secret of the heavenward shoot ?—
Yea, for grounded is thy root,
Deeply grounded, planted well,
Anchored in the Invisible.

In Winter

THE singing robes of earth are doffed,
Dissolvèd is the spell that wove
Vesture of gold upon the croft,
Green wreaths and russet for the grove.

Where piped the building birds the wind
Through the bare boughs a pibroch drones,
Crying through far glens of the mind
Where never ranged Spring's choric tones.

The shrilly chant dies moaning down,
The sky assumes an ashen stole,
And the gaunt trees in friar's brown
Muse on a sermon for the soul.

Peace in these vacant garths is found
And courage in the wind-swept ways ;
Ordained of wisdom is the round
Of frugal yet sufficing days—

Wisdom that matcheth mean and end,
Wisdom that loves the austere rule,
The girded loin, and bids us send
Spirit and flesh alike to school.

But in the breast another chord
Is sounded, for a hint is here
That not alone is wisdom lord,
Else were it winter all the year :

In Winter

See in yon willow's hoarded gold
Token of store in time of dearth,
Hint that the harnessed suns of old
Were driven o'er no grudging earth ;

That timely for the general weal
Bounties are given with lavish hand—
Not corn alone, nor doles of meal,
But oil and wine that glad the land.

Harvests beyond mere use are ours
For Love is planter of the fields ;
'Tis Love that wings in silver showers
And puissant Love that increase yields.

Now is Love clad in beggar's guise,
'Tis He, the Outcast ! . . . Sing, who know
His advent, once from winter skies
Sung to Judæan fields below.

A Beautiful Day in December

DAUGHTER of May, to old December bringing
Youth and strange warmth and founts of
sunny mirth !

Deep in the woodland scanty choirs are singing
Songs half forgotten of a happier earth.

Crowned not with leaves nor garlanded with flowers,
Pensive thou comest, maidenly of mien :
Soft is thy footfall in the winnowed bowers,
Loosened thy shadow-train along the green.

Minstrels have been who, born untimely, chanted
Songs of the splendour of a buried day :
So thou, a *trouvère*, passing memory-haunted,
Breathest in alien clime of vanished May.

Linger, O linger, in thy glamour steeping
Earth, ere thou speedest through the cloudy gate ;
Soon, soon thy flight, and long shall we be reaping
Sunless and songless days and desolate.

The Dead Sea

AH! heart of mine, that dim and perilous morn
Dost thou recall
When for thy turbulent flock of grown desires
The God-given ground seemed small,
Its pasturage fenced with thorn,
And when to thee as to the Hebrew sires
Was choice given 'twixt the uplands and that plain
Where lay the cities vain ?
Oh heart, rejoice
That thy so hesitant choice
Led to the difficult hills of God
Part of thy flock, though part
(Mourn, mourn, O heart !)
The alluring marches of the cities trod.

Ah ! heart of mine, not yet
Nor ever, shalt thou forget
That later day of flood and flame
That razed the cities of thy shame
But brought thee pardon ; nor the Name
Dread, yet belovèd, whence the pardon came.
And yet,
Although thy feet upon the hills be set,
The plain of thy desire,
Where burned the cleansing fire,
Lies hid beneath an acrid lake of tears ;
And it shall be
That not the streams of Lebanon, not the years,
Nor any healing tree
Shall e'er the saltness quench of that Dead Sea.

“He Opened not His Mouth”

HE opened not His mouth,
Was as a sheep before the shearers dumb ;
This was the sum
When unto the accusers He was come.
But to the seeking and the simple folk,
To them he spoke
Words that were like soft winds from out the south—
So opened He His mouth.

He opened not His mouth.
My heart was the accuser ; and no word,
No answering word He spake ; none was there heard
In voiceful nature ; yielded day but drouth
And night no other vision than of stars
Stretching athwart the dark like prison bars.
But in the mystic silence ere the dawn
Cleansed was my heart, her rebel charge withdrawn.
Then heard I new-born winds lisp in the trees,
The unforgetful birds their matins sing,
The feathered saints
Whose laud not soilèd is with plaints ;
And lo ! with these
To hail in simpleness the new daybreak
My heart took wing ;
And while one with that choir I lay awake
To me He spake.

Light of the World

WAS Thy heart broken and Thy body torn
Only for this, O Christ, that Thou shouldst
rise

Thereafter in our intellectual skies
As a star breaks the darkness and at morn
Fades from the firmament with kindred orbs
Whose fires new day absorbs ?

Not as a star, O Christ, not as a star
Do we acclaim Thee, though Thou givest light
To every Nicodemus of the night
And to the wise who seek Thee from afar.
Thou dost illumine these, yet lo ! for aye
Their night is turned to day.

How shall we image Thee, shall we Thy sign
See in the wan and stricken moon that waits
Hung on a hill of Heaven without the gates
While o'er the world is darkness ?—the divine,
Acceptable sacrifice earth can but choose
To mark with weeping dews.

Thy sign is not the moon, undying Christ,
(The dead moon which hath been sloughed off by
earth.)
That body which in Bethlehem had birth,
Wherein full God and man made whilom tryst,
Is as the moon. Thy quickening life doth flame
Through Heaven whence first it came.

Light of the World

Thou art the spring sufficing of our day,
And the outpoured flood. Thou, when prime dark-
ness heard
And quickened, wast the spark divine, " the Word,"
And Thou the little lamp by Judah's way
Given for our feet ; Thou, O Thou glorious one,
Art our immortal Sun.

Thou who didst suffer sufferest no more,
No more from nail or wounding thorn Thou bleedest,
Thou who of men wast led, from Heaven thou
leadest,
Of our revolving universe the core,
With us at dawn, strong helper at noon-tide,
Through the long day our guide.

Yet darkness falls, and Thou dost seem withdrawn ;
Runes on the wall of Heaven star-charactered
Beckon and baffle thought, and there is heard
No Daniel's voice. But Thou dost make a dawn
For us, and of that scroll a simple thing,
Thy light interpreting.

Glimpses we have of other earths and suns
That haply ray forth life and health as ours,
But not to us. We bow at His dread powers,
Father of Lights, whose span our thought outruns,
And flee the dark, seeking Thy human face,
Our light and hiding-place.

Light of the World

Full well we know that if too long, too long,
We ponder that deep mystery of Night,
Dizzied we grow, we faint, and even Thy light
Begets in us no morn ; no mounting song
Of triumph heavenward wings, no matin note
Of trust wells from our throat.

Light of the world, we turn us from the vast
Obscurities that blur and blind the brain ;
We would see Jesus, would with Thee remain,
Our sun and the round world's while the years last.
(Speed, noon of days, when Christ shall be adored
Earth's alone, only Lord !)

Envoy

NOT vain the graven verse
That featly doth rehearse
The trafficking of beauty and her spells :
Her rising from the foam,
Soft footfall in the gloam,
And her shy flight across the misty fells.

Not vain the poet's art
Whereby he doth impart
So various beauty, but he hath this sting :
That not through all the years
Shall his song touch the ears
Of them that most need beauty's houseling.

He in the holy fane
Not ministers in vain
Who uttereth benediction as God's priest,
Yet yearns he to fare forth
And hale from south and north
All them that hunger to the sacred feast.

This ruth is born of Him
Who spake in ages dim
Through seer and psalmist to a little clan,
But now hath come from far,
Love's conquering avatar,
Word of all truth and beauty unto man.

Envoy

Wherefore, though these my lays
Sing beauty's wilding ways,
Scant will the music be if they forget
To sing that Word most sweet,
That light for human feet
Kindled in Bethlehem and on Calvary set.

THE END

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